

Understanding the role of conferences for industry-university collaborations

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Wanxin Chen, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Business School at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by both International Research Scholarship (IRS) and UTS President's Scholarship (UTSP). This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Conference Presentations Arising from the Doctoral Research

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Abstract

Industry-university collaborations have been acknowledged as a crucial mechanism for innovation in knowledge-based economies. However, ties between the industry and university sectors is relatively weak globally and especially in Australia. Governments wish to encourage links between industry and universities, and measures to encourage these links are central to innovation agendas at state and national levels in Australia and worldwide.

Conferences are highly valued by many academics and practitioners as an informal knowledge transfer channel between industry and universities. Research indicates that the informal communication established at conferences may provide opportunities for the establishment of more formal collaborations between academics and practitioners. However, limited academic attention has been paid to understanding how conferences influence the establishment and maintenance of collaborative relationships between academics and practitioners.

Researchers have begun exploring the value of conferences for thriving knowledge-based economies, such as their potential to generate new knowledge and facilitate collaboration. However, extant academic literature mainly focuses on firm-to-firm interactions in the context of conferences and offers very little detail when it comes to academic-practitioner interactions. It is difficult to facilitate such interactions at conferences without knowing the current state and characteristics of existing interactions.

Based on the Interaction Approach and Relationship Learning theory, this study has explored the current state of interactions between academics and practitioners at conferences and factors that influence their interactions at conferences. A qualitative methodology was adopted, and data were collected using semi-structured interviews with academics, practitioners, partnership managers, and government agency staff who have attended conferences that offer industry-academia engagements.

The findings of this study show that conferences do play an important role in facilitating industry-university collaborations, especially for the initiation stage of a collaboration. However, the level of engagement between practitioners and academics at conferences was found to be limited. Academics were motivated to learn from practitioners when attending conferences, but practitioners did not show a similar interest in learning from academics. Furthermore, this study identified several factors that influence academic-practitioner interactions at conferences.

The study contributes to a theoretical extension of interaction theory and relationship learning theory, and it enriches current understanding of knowledge transfer between industry and university at conferences. Practically, this research has policy implications for improving Australia's national innovation system, as well as practical implications for industry, universities, and conference organizers who wish to leverage the valuable legacies associated with industry-university collaboration.

Table of Contents

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THE DOCTORAL RESEARCH	IV
ABSTRACT	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	X
LIST OF TABLES.....	XI
LIST OF FIGURES.....	XI
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION	1
1.2 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION	5
1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	9
1.4 METHODOLOGY	10
1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY	11
1.6 CONTRIBUTIONS.....	12
1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF SCOPE	12
1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	13
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 INTRODUCTION	16
2.2 TYPES OF CONFERENCES.....	16
2.3 INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS.....	20
2.3.1 <i>Background of industry-university collaborations</i>	21
2.3.2 <i>Significance of industry-university collaborations</i>	24
<i>The positive relationship between industry-university collaboration and innovation</i>	25
<i>Conflicting arguments on the effects of industry-university collaborations</i>	27
2.4 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS	31
2.4.1 <i>Barriers to industry-university collaborations</i>	31
<i>Orientation-related barriers</i>	31
<i>Transaction-related barriers</i>	34
<i>Resource-related barriers</i>	35
2.4.2 <i>Enablers for industry-university collaborations</i>	37
2.5 CONFERENCES AS A CHANNEL FOR INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS	40
2.5.1 <i>Knowledge and knowledge creation</i>	41
<i>Information and knowledge</i>	41
<i>Explicit and tacit knowledge</i>	42
<i>Conflicts between industry and universities regarding knowledge</i>	45
2.5.2 <i>Industry-university collaboration channels</i>	45
<i>Formal channels</i>	47
<i>Informal channels</i>	49
<i>Relationship between informal and formal channels</i>	50
2.5.3 <i>Conferences within the context of collaboration channel research</i>	52
2.6 INTERACTIONS AT CONFERENCES.....	54
2.6.1 <i>Conferences as inter-organizational learning and relational spaces</i>	55
2.6.2 <i>Information and knowledge-sharing and socializing as two main interactions</i>	58
<i>Information and knowledge sharing</i>	59
<i>Socializing</i>	62

2.6.3 Academics and practitioners are important players	64
CHAPTER 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	68
3.1 INTRODUCTION	68
3.2 INTERACTION APPROACH.....	69
3.2.1 <i>The Interaction Model</i>	70
<i>Interaction process</i>	71
<i>Participants in the interaction process</i>	72
<i>Environment</i>	72
<i>Atmosphere</i>	73
3.2.2 <i>The Episode-Relationship-Network Model</i>	74
3.3 RELATIONSHIP LEARNING.....	77
3.3.1 <i>Conceptualization of relationship learning</i>	77
3.3.2 <i>Sub-processes of relationship learning</i>	79
<i>Information sharing</i>	80
<i>Shared interpretation</i>	80
<i>Relationship-specific memories</i>	81
3.4 DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	83
CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN	87
4.1 INTRODUCTION	87
4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS	88
4.2.1 <i>Ontology, epistemology and axiology of this research</i>	89
4.2.2 <i>Qualitative methodology</i>	90
4.2.3 <i>Rationale for adopting qualitative methodology</i>	92
4.3 RESEARCH METHODS	93
4.3.1 <i>Data collection method: semi-structured interviews</i>	94
4.3.2 <i>Purposeful sampling strategy</i>	97
<i>Selection criteria</i>	97
<i>Recruitment methods</i>	99
<i>Number and profile of participants</i>	101
4.3.3 <i>Data collection procedures and strategy</i>	104
<i>Pilot Interviews</i>	104
<i>During interviews</i>	105
<i>After interviews</i>	106
4.3.4 <i>Data Analysis</i>	106
<i>Data preparation and management</i>	106
<i>Thematic data analysis</i>	107
4.4 VALIDATION OF THE RESEARCH	108
4.4.1 <i>Credibility</i>	109
4.4.2 <i>Transferability</i>	110
4.4.3 <i>Dependability</i>	111
4.4.4 <i>Conformability</i>	112
4.5 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS	112
4.5.1 <i>Interview-oriented method limitations</i>	112
4.5.2 <i>Limitation of sampling</i>	113
CHAPTER 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	114
5.1 INTRODUCTION	114
5.2 THE GENERATIVE ROLE OF CONFERENCES FOR INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS	114
5.2.1 <i>Raising awareness of the possibility of collaborations</i>	115
5.2.2 <i>Networking to access potential collaborators</i>	120
5.2.3 <i>Creating the conditions for serendipity</i>	125
5.2.4 <i>Assessing partnership managers' work performance</i>	126

5.3 THE DEGENERATIVE ROLE OF CONFERENCES FOR INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS.....	128
5.3.1 <i>Limited levels of engagement between practitioners and academics</i>	129
<i>Conferences in business schools and associated industries</i>	131
<i>Conferences in engineering and information technology schools and associated industries</i>	134
5.3.2 <i>An imbalanced learning relationship between academics and practitioners</i>	142
5.4 CHARACTERIZING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND PRACTITIONERS AT CONFERENCES.....	147
5.4.1 <i>Information and knowledge sharing and seeking</i>	147
<i>Company position and role dictate information and knowledge sought by practitioners</i>	147
<i>Academics seek information and knowledge about industry issues</i>	150
5.4.2 <i>Socializing</i>	152
<i>Target socializing</i>	153
<i>Random socializing</i>	157
<i>Referral socializing</i>	159
5.5 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND PRACTITIONERS AT CONFERENCES.....	163
5.5.1 <i>Factors related to interaction process</i>	163
<i>Factors related to information and knowledge-sharing and seeking</i>	164
<i>Factors related to socializing</i>	169
5.5.2 <i>Factors related to participants</i>	177
<i>Organizational factors</i>	177
<i>Individual factors</i>	182
5.5.3 <i>Factors related to the design of conferences</i>	189
<i>Size of conferences</i>	189
<i>Format of conferences</i>	191
<i>Topic of conferences</i>	194
5.6 SUMMARY OF RESULTS	195
5.6.1 <i>In what ways do conferences influence industry-university collaborations?</i>	195
5.6.2 <i>How do academics and practitioners interact at conferences?</i>	196
5.6.3 <i>Factors that influence the effectiveness of interactions between academics and practitioners</i>	198
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION	199
6.1 INTRODUCTION	199
6.2 A REFINED FRAMEWORK FOR THIS RESEARCH.....	201
6.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.....	204
6.3.1 <i>Contributions to channels of industry-university collaborations literature</i>	204
6.3.2 <i>Contributions to factors that influence industry-university collaboration literature</i>	208
6.3.3 <i>Contributions to interactions at conferences literature</i>	213
6.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	218
6.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	221
6.5.1 <i>A final word - Covid-19</i>	223
REFERENCES.....	226
APPENDICES.....	236
APPENDIX 1: TABULAR SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON INTERACTIONS AT CONFERENCE CONTEXTS REVIEWED	236
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	248
APPENDIX 3: NVIVO CODEBOOK EXAMPLES.....	249

List of abbreviations

Abbreviations	Explanations
ARC	Australian Research Council
CEO	Chief executive officer
CIS	Community Innovation Survey
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DUI mode	Doing, Using and Interacting mode
G20	Group of Twenty, an international forum with members from 19 countries and the European Union.”
G7	Group of Seven, an intergovernmental organization including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.
IMP Group	Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group
IP	Intellectual Property
IUCRC	Industry-University Cooperative Research Centers
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
R&D	Research and development
SMEs	Small-to-medium enterprises
STI mode	Science, Technology and Innovation mode
TTOs	Technology Transfer Offices
UIIN	University Industry Innovation Network
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTS	University of Technology Sydney

List of tables

Table 2-1 Summary of four types of conferences	19
Table 2-2 Orientation-related barriers from university and industry perspectives	34
Table 2-3 Transaction-related barriers from university and industry perspectives.....	35
Table 2-4 Resource-related barriers from university and industry perspectives.....	37
Table 2-5 Category of industry-university collaboration channels and its knowledge types	47
Table 3-1 Four components of the Interaction Model	71
Table 4-1 Characteristics of qualitative studies	91
Table 4-2 Differences between the three types of interviews	96
Table 4-3 Profile and codes of participants.....	102
Table 6-1 Contributions to channels of industry-university collaborations literature.....	207
Table 6-2 Contributions to factors that influence industry-university collaboration literature...	211
Table 6-3 Contributions to interactions at conferences literature	216

List of figures

Figure 1-1 Firms' links with universities and other higher education institutions.....	3
Figure 1-2 Collaboration rate between firms and universities in Australia and OECD countries ..	6
Figure 2-1 Boundary of conferences studied in this thesis	20
Figure 2-2 Dynamic version of the post-war paradigm	23
Figure 2-3 Quadrant model of scientific research.....	24
Figure 2-4 Four modes of knowledge conversion.....	44
Figure 2-5 Industry-university collaboration activities.....	48
Figure 2-6 Classification of conference benefits	57
Figure 3-1 Relationship between the four elements in the Interaction Model.....	73
Figure 3-2 Relationship of three levels of the Episode-Relationship-Network Model.....	75
Figure 3-3 Differences between inter-organizational learning and relationship learning.....	78
Figure 3-4 A proposed conceptual framework.....	84
Figure 6-1 Refined framework adapted from the literature and findings	200